

plants, with small leaves. In Arabia it is mainly *Haplophyllum* (Rutaceae), in the southern Kalahari/Namib it is *Deverra* (Umbelliferae). Both have small leaves, and in fact the larva mainly feeds on the cortex of the plant stems. It has a completely different, variegated pattern that renders it well camouflaged on these plants.

Looking at the two different larva, it is difficult to believe they belong to the same species. But I have been unable to find any differences between the adult butterflies. It seems that the patterns have developed as differential camouflage on their very different host plants. I did publish a small paper in South Africa suggesting that a closer study of this might be a good topic for a MSc (or even PhD), but it seems there have been no takers.

I had been two weeks away from home, and for six days I had seen no other human being (how many human beings did you see during the past six days?). I headed back towards Gaborone. Suddenly, as I crossed the crest of a small hill, two gleaming Toyota Land-Cruisers came into view. I wound my way down in my rather less up-market Toyota Hi-Lux: "Hi how are you doing want a cold beer?" said the man, with a typical South African accent. THAT went without saying, and I clambered into the Land-Cruiser, equipped with fridge, sleeping quarters, and air-conditioning. The two men were geologists doing a transect survey for the de Beers Mining Company; the other Land-Cruiser was full of all sorts of sophisticated electronic equipment and bristling with so many antennae as to make even the best-equipped member of the Coleoptera deeply jealous.

We chatted for a while. This was not a place where you usually meet other people. "You wanna talk to your wife?", one of them asked, as he uncorked another round of beer. I had told them I lived in Gabs (as we old Africa hands call Gaborone. "No, that won't be possible, she's in London", I said. "No problem!". He fiddled with the antennae, directing them at the most suitable satellite, and pretty soon I was dialing our London number, not without a little excitement. The usual ringing tone of London was soon there.

I waited with bated breath, only to hear my own voice: "Neither Nancy Fee nor Torben Larsen are available at the moment; you may send a fax or leave a message after the beep". I freely admit this was a letdown. In fact, it was so much of a letdown that I managed to leave only a somewhat garbled message on the ansaphone! Shame – as we say in southern Africa.– TORBEN B. LARSEN, 5 Wilson Compound, 2811 Park Avenue, Pasay City, Metro-Manila, The Philippines.

Hill-topping by Red Admirals *Vanessa atalanta* L. (Lep.: Nymphalidae)

On 1 August 1999 we witnessed what to our mind was clearly "hill-topping" by two Red Admirals *Vanessa atalanta* L. on the north coast of Anglesey, west of Bull Bay, at grid reference SH 413944. The time was approximately 4 pm and the weather was becoming slightly hazy after a warm, sunny day with little wind, which broke into thunderstorms in the early evening.

The general habitat comprised undulating coastal grassland 40 to 50 metres in altitude; the *V. atalanta* were on the highest point, the estimated altitude of which was 82 metres. The whole area was heavily grazed by sheep and apart from frequent gorse bushes, contained little vegetation besides "improved" grass. We watched the *V. atalanta* for approximately ten minutes; they made regular short flights across the top of the hillock, but were not observed to interact with each other or attempt to leave. They were the only *V. atalanta* observed during a full day's recording in this and other parts of Anglesey. There was no obvious breeding habitat for the species in the immediate vicinity.

Other butterflies in the immediate vicinity were one Wall *Lasionmata megera* L. and one Grayling *Hipparchia semele* L., both males, both of which were at a slightly lower level than the *V. atalanta* and which appeared to be resting rather than "hill-topping", and several Gatekeepers *Pyronia tithonus* L., the dominant species in the area that day and the only one which ranged throughout the grassland.

Hill-topping by *V. atalanta* has been remarked on by American authors including O. Shields (1967, Hilltopping, *J. Res. Lep.* 6(2): 69-178), who mentions that the behaviour was recorded in Ireland as long ago as 1922 by C.B. Moffat (Some habits of the Red Admiral and Painted Lady butterflies, *Irish Nat.* 31: 61-65), and J. Scott (1968, Hilltopping as a mating mechanism to aid the survival of low density species, *J. Res. Lep.* 7(4): 191-204).— PETER B. HARDY, 10 Dudley Road, Sale, Cheshire M33 7BB and PHILIP M. KINDER, 11 Westover, Bredbury Green, Stockport, Cheshire SK6 3ER.

A memorable night for Orange Moths *Angeronia prunaria* (L.) (Lep.: Geometridae)

In Essex, the Orange Moth *Angeronia prunaria*, is considered a very local species of medium density, but the summer of 1999 saw an unusual increase in records of this attractive species from members of Essex Moth Group operating mercury vapour lamps and moth traps. Some recorders reported *prunaria* for the first time.

On the night of 7 July, with three other Essex Moth Group colleagues, Ian Rose, David Warner and Paul Harris, I carried out a moth survey at Hoe Wood, Aldham, near Colchester for the Woodland Trust. We used four m.v. lamps and one Skinner-type trap in the wood's rides on a sultry night when the temperature at midnight was still 19°C. The night was notable for the profusion of *prunaria*. We estimate that the total seen at or near the lights was probably near to a hundred. As many as twenty moths of both sexes were at each lamp station, or resting on nearby vegetation, at 11pm with an equal number on the sheets and in the trap.

Some exceptional colour forms of both sexes were seen. These included five extreme examples of the male form *corylaria* Thunb., and two deeply-coloured females of the *corylaria* form. The moth species total for the night was 64.

Hoe Wood is an ancient mixed deciduous wood which covers 21.5 acres. Birch is one of the dominant species and this is probably the main larval foodplant of *prunaria* at this particular site.— JOE FIRMIN, 55 Chapel Road, West Bergholt, Colchester, Essex CO6 3HZ.